

The Churches of Kythera:  
How the People of Northern Kythera Used Churches as a System of Defense  
during the Late-Byzantine and Venetian Periods

Research Thesis

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the geographic significance of churches constructed on the Greek island of Kythera between the 10<sup>th</sup> century and mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. Close analysis of the churches in the northern half of the island shows that these structures, along with their spiritual functions, were often used in tandem with defensive structures or as defensive structures themselves. These religious buildings performed the role of watchtowers, or *viglae*. This conclusion is based on the geographic relationships between the churches and the villages, roads, and coasts, as well as by the architectural features of several of these sites. This thesis also argues that the churches and the saints associated with them provided divine protection for the Kytheran people. This is made evident through studying the dedications of these churches, as well as the frescoes on their walls and the written narrative sources. Finally, I suggest some avenues for future research both in southern Kythera and in the southern Peloponnese, and how these areas can be reanalyzed in light of my research.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This study is an analysis the construction patterns of Kythera's many Byzantine and Venetian era churches (ca A.D. 900 to 1537). The inspiration for this thesis came from several observations that I made while participating in the Kythera Water Project archaeological survey in 2014. The first observation was the question of why individuals or communities dedicated their churches to a particular saint. There are several possibilities for why a person might dedicate a church to one saint over another, for example: out of gratitude for an answered prayer, to honor a saint they considered to be their own personal patron, or to invoke the protection and favor of a specific saint. Although all of these options are plausible and may have occurred simultaneously, this last possibility was the theory that most interested me. Specifically, that the people of Kythera built and dedicated their churches with the specific desire that the saints would protect them in return for their offering.

Secondly, after considering why these churches were named, I considered the question of why they were placed in a particular location. Most of them are located in one of the following environments: the middle of a town, on top of a hill, or on the coastline. Churches placed in a

village center seem easy to explain, as that location is preferable for the villagers due to its near proximity. However, how does one explain the remaining sites? I considered the possibility that those churches built outside a settlement may have performed a supporting function. That is, not only did they serve religious purposes, but also served political and military ones. This phenomenon is not uncommon for this period, and there is written evidence that several Kytheran churches served civic or martial functions throughout the Venetian period.

Finally, I wished to analyze these churches from a chronological standpoint, in order to compare the dates of construction of each church with the contemporary historical circumstances. For example: to understand what events may have instigated the dramatic increase in construction during the early 13<sup>th</sup> century or the subsequent decrease in later centuries. Most of my observations were drawn from several catalogues that ventured to date Kythera's Byzantine churches. The two main catalogues were M. Chatzidakis and I. Bitha's *Ευρετήριο Βυζαντινών Τοιχογραφιών Ελλάδος Κύθηρα* (1997) and a Microsoft Access database created by the Australian Paliochora-Kythera Archaeological Survey. The sources do not always agree with one another about their hypotheses and due to the nature of the evidence none are able to claim with complete certainty that the construction dates allotted to each site are correct. Nevertheless, they do provide a range of reasonable dates for each church. This information allowed me to review the churches in a more defined historical context.

Although the availability of primary sources for Byzantine Kythera is better than it is for other periods, it nevertheless remains quite scant. The Venetian government kept close records and completed several censuses, but unfortunately most of these documents are concerned with periods later than what is studied in this thesis (after 1537 A.D.). The two most important primary sources for the Byzantine period are *Ὁ βίος του αγίου Θεοδώρου Κυθήρων*

(Oikonomides 1967) and *Antique Memorie di Cerigo* (Sathas 1880-1890). The former describes the life of the important Kytheran saint Osios Theodoros, and the latter is from *Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au Moyen Âge* (Sathas 1880-1890). Because of the limited access to primary sources, secondary scholarship has relied heavily on archaeological evidence in addition to these literary sources.

The archaeological project that I most relied upon was the Australian Paliochora-Kythera Archaeological Survey (APKAS). APKAS is dedicated to studying the settlement history of Northern Kythera in all periods, from remote antiquity to the present, but with a special interest in the Middle Ages. This archaeological project was important for my research because among other things, it catalogued Kythera's Byzantine churches as a part of its study of the northern villages. Also important were the Kythera Island Project, which studied the cultural and environmental history of the island, with a special focus on the southern part of the island, as well as J.N. Coldstream and G.L. Huxley's *Kythera: Excavations and Studies*, which carried out detailed excavations around Kastri in the 1960's.

Along with these primary sources, the most essential secondary writings for my thesis were: G. Leontsinis *The Island of Kythera a Social History* (2000), Timothy E. Gregory and Lita Tzortozopoulou-Gregory's *The Archaeology of Kythera* (in press), and Ch. Maletzou's *A Contribution to the Historical Geography of the Island of Kythera during the Venetian Occupation* (1980). These books provided insight into the history of Kythera during the Byzantine and Venetian periods, as well as to the context in which the churches were built.

Finally, this thesis could not have been completed without the advice and written works of Timothy E. Gregory, as well as assistance from Richard MacNeil and the other affiliates of the Kythera Water Project, and Josh Sadvari of the Ohio State University Research Commons.

## Chapter 2: A Short History of Kythera

The island of Kythera is located at the southern end of the Laconian Gulf, between Cape Malea and Cape Tenairon, at the center of major trade routes crossing through the eastern Mediterranean. Ships traveling through the Aegean Sea heading west towards the Ionian Sea, or of course vice-versa, must sail in close proximity to the island. At the same time, Kythera is also positioned in between the important trade route connecting Crete to the Republic of Venice. Due to this strategic location, the major maritime powers of the Late Byzantine and Venetian periods maintained an interest in the island and it became the object of many raids and invasions. With the exception of the fortified settlement at Ayios Demetrios (today known as Paliochora), almost no significant fortifications were built on the northern half of Kythera.<sup>1</sup> The Australian Paliochora-Kythera Archaeological Survey, or APKAS,<sup>2</sup> has collected data on the Byzantine churches of Northern Kythera, as well as published scholarship concerning these buildings. Using primarily these resources I argue that Kythera's churches, aside from being centers of religious activity, also acted as a rudimentary system of defense for the island. Kytherans used these building as watchtowers, or *viglae* (*vigles* in Greek), while also hoping that these churches and the saints associated with them would attract divine protection.

Before looking at the information provided by APKAS, a basic understanding of the historical and social context these churches were built within is necessary. The theme of

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<sup>1</sup> One possible exception to this, is the tower of Gerakari, which is located far north of Potamos. This tower stands on top a hill, overlooking the east and west coasts, as well as much of the interior. However, studies on this site have not yet provided a plausible date of construction and the tower could be credited to any of the political groups that controlled the island after the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Local folklore attributes this building to a Turkish tax collector Amir Ali, but this possibility seems to be unlikely.

<sup>2</sup> The APKAS project is devoted to understanding and interpreting the settlement history of N. Kythera, with a special focus on the resettlement of the island in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and the consequences following the sack of Ayios Demetrios by Hayreddin Barbarossa's fleet in 1537.

abandonment is one of the most important themes in Kythera's history. The people of the island even today maintain that seven times the island went through a cycle of abandonment and re-inhabitation.<sup>3</sup> One of these putative abandonments was initiated by the foundation of the Emirate of Crete in the 820's and lasted until after the reconquest of the island in 961.<sup>4</sup> Presumably, the instability caused by the presence of Slavic and Arab raiders in the Aegean was also responsible for substantial depopulation in the years preceding and following these proposed dates of desertion. Historians have disagreed on the precise nature of such abandonments and there have been several explanations for this phenomenon. Some have suggested that the island was completely abandoned,<sup>5</sup> while others have suggested small Greek populations remained<sup>6</sup> and/or that it became a base for Arab pirates.<sup>7</sup> Modern scholarship for the island of Kythera claims very few certainties regarding this period and hopefully additional discoveries can further clarify what life was like on the island. Nevertheless, the actual or perceived abandonment of Kythera continues to play a large role in the island's history and the psyche of the people living there today.

Osios Theodoros, one of Kythera's most important patron saints, arrived to the island during this period of supposed population decline. His short period of ascetic residence on the island is closely linked to the repopulation of Kythera in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> According to his story, Osios Theodoros, who desired the seclusion available on the island of Kythera, sailed to

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<sup>3</sup> Ian Johnson and Andrew Wilson. 2003. *Making the Most of Map: Field Survey on the Island of Kythera*. pp. 81-89. The source also provides further insight into APKAS' use of GIS, as well as background of the church database (both of which were integral to the completion of this thesis).

<sup>4</sup> Judith Herrin. 2013. "Byzantine Kythera" *Margins and Metropolis*. pg. 139.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> George N. Leontsinis. 1987. *The Island of Kythera: A Social History*. pg. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy E. Gregory and Lita Tzortozopoulou-Gregory (In Press). *The Archaeology of Kythera*. pg. 35. This theory stems from the story of the Arab pirates mentioned in the Life of *Osios Theodoros* who were able to escape from the Byzantine navy. As of yet this pirate base has not been discovered.

<sup>8</sup> N.A. Oikonomides. 1968. *Ο Βίος του αγίου Θεοδοῦρου Κυθηρω*.

the island on a Byzantine naval ship because no other vessel was willing to risk the journey. He lived on the island practicing solitude and prayer before passing away in May of 922.<sup>9</sup> After several years a group of hunters from Monemvasia found the body of the saint miraculously intact and those who witnessed the miracle spread the news to the rest of southern Greece. When the story eventually reached the mainland, it spurred population to return to the island and the abandonment was finally ended. Only after the arrival and death of Osios Theodoros was the island considered safe enough to inhabit. Because of this the people hold him as their special protector and granted him the title *oikistis*, meaning founder.<sup>10</sup>

The island's history becomes clearer after this period. As it began to recover from its abandonment, families from the Peloponnese attempted to take political control of the island. While Kythera's population and economy did grow, it was certainly affected by the frequent political turnover, which continued well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, in these periods (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries) Kythera was contested by the towns of Sparta and Monemvasia, and it appears that it was Sparta, who first claimed control of the island.<sup>11</sup> A so-called "despot" of Sparta<sup>12</sup> was responsible for the construction of the monastery of Osios. Theodoros in the 10<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>13</sup> as well as for sending the first governors to the island. However, control of Kythera was eventually transferred to the Eudaimonyiannis family of Monemvasia, after the rule of Georgios Pachys, who gave the island to the family in the 12th century.<sup>14</sup> The Eudaimonyiannis family ruled the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* *The Life of Osios Theodoros* also mentions that the saint predicted his own passing by writing out the date of his death on a nearby rock.

<sup>10</sup> William R. Caraher. 2008. *Constructing Memories: Hagiography, Church Architecture, and the Religious Landscape of Middle Byzantine Greece: The Case of St. Theodore of Kythera*. pp. 276-277.

<sup>11</sup> George N. Ince, and Theodore Koukoulis. 1987. *The Survey of Paliochora*. References Sathas, G.N. 1883-1184. *L'antique memorie dell'isola di Cerigo*. pg. 87.

<sup>12</sup> *L'antique memorie dell'isola di Cerigo* does not make it clear precisely what is meant by the title despotes as no such person is attested in Sparta during this time. This may only mean some sort of powerful governor, but that is only speculation and in no way certain.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory and Tzortzopoulou-Gregory. *op cit.* pg. 41.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



island mostly independent of the Byzantine Empire, and continued to hold some sort of political power well into the 14th century.

The sack of Constantinople in 1204, naturally had a profound effect on the island. Kythera became the property of Venice, which the Crusaders agreed upon before they captured Constantinople, and was subsequently transferred to a Venetian noble family, the Venieri.<sup>15</sup> This family became responsible for first conquering the island and then administrating it. Although the island was officially under the control of Marquis Venieri de Cerigo by 1207,<sup>16</sup> he preferred to live in Crete, where he also owned land. While there would certainly have been some clashing with the Eudaimonyiannis family, a Greek governor is still documented in 1275,<sup>17</sup> suggesting the island remained at least partially in Monemvasian hands. In fact, the Venieri family often took an “overtly conciliatory policy towards the Greeks,” twice marrying into the Eudaimonyiannis family and possibly explaining how the island remained under control of Monemvasia for so long a period.<sup>18</sup>

It was perhaps during this period of Monemvasian control that Byzantine Kythera’s most important town, Ayios Demetrios, was constructed. This was the most populated town on the island up until its destruction in 1537 by the Ottoman admiral, Hayreddin Barbarossa, as part of a larger campaign against Venetian power in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>19</sup> Evidence of prosperity on

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Herrin. 1972. “Byzantine Kythera” In *Coldstream and Huxley*. pg. 41. Kythera is not explicitly in the Partition of 1204 but fell under the category of islands that Venice claimed for itself.

<sup>16</sup> Leontsinis, *op cit*. pg. 34. Citing Chelias. *Chronikon monasterii S. Theodori*. Marquis de Cerigo himself claimed relation to the goddess Aphrodite, making Kythera his birthright. Kythera was strongly associated with the birthplace of Aphrodite throughout classical literature, for example: line 257 in the first book of Vergil’s Aeneid.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*. pg. 36. This source maintains that the Eudaimonyiannis were, “A vassal of the (Venetian) Emperor and captains of Cerigo.”

<sup>18</sup> Peter Lock. 1995. *Franks in the Aegean*. pg. 148.

<sup>19</sup> Fernand Braudel. 1972. *The Mediterranean World in the Age of King Phillip II*. pg. 127.

the island during this time of Eudaimonyianian control is shown through the increase in church construction during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, many of which are richly decorated.<sup>20</sup>

Not until 1309 did the Venieri family take more direct control of Kythera, when they promptly split the island into 24 sections (called *carati*), ruled by four Venieri family members.<sup>21</sup> However, as previously noted, the Venieri family was more interested in their holdings on Crete, and although they finally held Kythera in their own right, it was being governed indirectly.<sup>22</sup> It is appears the Venieri did not find Kythera economically profitable, asking Venice as early as 1315 to buy the island back.<sup>23</sup> The island appears to have been neglected by the noble families, as indicated by a Turkish pirate base, which the Venieri had allowed to take hold.<sup>24</sup> During this period of neglect, an argument can be made that the population in the north was acting semi-independently and the local aristocracy was acting on its own behalf.

After the participation of the Venieri in the revolt of Crete in 1363, in which several member of the family sided with the Cretan rebels, the Venetian state attempted to establish more direct rule by sending a *castelleno* (“castle-keeper” or governor) to the port of Kapsali.<sup>25</sup> In order to strengthen the connection with Crete the Venetians increased their focus on the southern part of the island by improving the fortifications there.<sup>26</sup> This was partly due to the propensity of the Venetian Republic to concentrate on suitable harbors, such as at Kapsali and Avlemonas,<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Herrin. *op cit.* pg. 46

<sup>21</sup> Leontsinis. *op cit.* pg. 36.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* The island was governed by agents of the Venieri family, the Kassimati, who were among the most important families on Crete.

<sup>23</sup> Leontsinis. *op cit.* pg. 51. Venice declined this offer, but did increase the amount of grain being shipped to the island in an attempt to appease the Venieri’s concerns.

<sup>24</sup> Judith Herrin. 1972. “Byzantine Kythera” in *Coldstream and Huxley*: pp. 145-6. Citing Thiriet. 1960. *La Romanie vénitienne au Moyen Age*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Chryssa Maltezou. 1980. *A Contribution to the Historical Geography of the Island of Kythira during the Venetian Occupation*. pg. 152.

but also because they came to recognize Kythera as the “eye of Crete,” as well as an important base against the Ottoman’s navy.<sup>28</sup> While they did, perhaps, make improvements to the fortification at Paliochora, it does not appear that any other significant fortifications were built in the north even though there was a significant population living there.<sup>29</sup>

These selected themes from this short summary of Kythera’s history provide necessary information directly relating to the pattern of church construction. The historical circumstances covered did not encourage the formation of a proper defensive system for the population of northern Kythera. The entities in charge of the island were either mostly disinterested in developing it, or only interested in certain aspects of the island (such as the ports). The island was contested by different families, towns, and nearby empires, all the while being beset by the raids of local pirates. The rulers of each of these powers had different goals for using the island and different means of control. Although the island was potentially prosperous its full economic capability was not recognized and therefore not worth the cost to protect.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> This is again excluding the tower at Gerakari. Further studies of the tower may slightly change this theory of Venetian neglect in the north (if it was indeed constructed by Venetians), however even if the tower is included much of this part of the island was still left undefended.

### Chapter 3: Kytheran Churches as Places of Defense

The historian, G. Leonstinis, points out Kythera's defensive vulnerabilities by writing that,

One thing Kythera conspicuously lacked, however, was a systematic military organization. A large population was therefore useful (to the Venetians) for the additional reason that it enabled the administration to post lookouts (*vilgatores*) at key points on the island. Their basic function was to keep a constant watch on the sea approaches and to light beacon-fires whenever pirate ships were sighted. On seeing the alarm signal, the inhabitants would take refuge in the nearest castle.<sup>30</sup>

However, there are very few of Leontsinis' mentioned *viglae* known on the island.<sup>31</sup> Most of the defensive structures implemented by the Venetians were placed in the harbors in the south and this did not leave an adequate system of defense for the north. Rather, I maintain that Kythera's many churches acted as *viglae*, thus filling in this suggested defensive void.

The data for the majority of the churches in this study was collected by APKAS, and was organized into a Microsoft Access database. This database contains material on 88 churches, 38 of which are argued to have been built before 1537. The evidence for the date of construction for these churches is based primarily on the chronology of the frescoes located within them as established by Chatzidakis and Bitha.<sup>32</sup> Gregory further analyzed the dates for these churches as a part of the APKAS project. He accomplished this by combining analysis of the architectural features with the putative dates assigned to the frescoes. These two catalogues also analyzed early attempts to study these churches, such as Soteriou's *Μεσαιωνικά Μνημεία Κυθήρων*.<sup>33</sup> Gregory has argued that Chatzidakis and Bitha tended to date some of these churches too late,

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<sup>30</sup> Leontsinis. *op. cit.* pg. 48

<sup>31</sup> Keep in consideration here the tower of Gerakari, which although its origins remain uncertain, may alter the landscape narrative of this part of the island when further studies reveal the answers to these questions.

<sup>32</sup> Manolis Chatzidakis and Ioanna Bitha. 1997. *Ενρετήριο Βυζαντινών Τοιχογραφιών Ελλάδος Κύθηρα*. These dates were formed by comparing the stylistic features of churches located in nearby Monemvasia and the Mani, as well as those of larger cultural centers. Chatzidakis and Bitha also worked with the earlier attempts of other historians, who attempted to catalogue the island's churches.

<sup>33</sup> G. Soteriou. 1923. *Μεσαιωνικά Μνημεία Κυθήρων*.

and the data in APKAS database reflects this criticism.<sup>34</sup> The complete list of churches APKAS has claimed were built before 1537 are shown in figure-1 (shown below), but not all can be dated with the same certainty due to the ambiguous nature of their architectural characteristics.<sup>35</sup>

The APKAS database is used here primarily, because it is the most complete collection of data concerning the churches of Kythera. However, the survey area of APKAS only includes the part of the island between Aroniadika and Ayia Anastasia, but excludes most of the churches located within Paliochora.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Chatzidakis and Bitha's *Ευρετήριο Βυζαντινών Τοιχογραφίων Ελλάδος: Κύθηρα* will be used to supplement the APKAS database in order to analyze information for some of the churches located outside of the survey area. However, this book is heavily focused on the frescoes and in fact leave out churches that do not contain any wall paintings. In addition, this very important study does not include information such as precise location and elevation, which is important for the present research.<sup>37</sup>

A well-founded case can be made that the churches in the following pages were used as watchtowers by the Kytherans. Many were placed at a high elevation or upon a hill, which often overlooked the coastline, a village, or an important entrance into the interior of the island.<sup>38</sup> A few of these churches are also paired with, or attached to, a tower that may have been used as a

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<sup>34</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. *op. cit.* pg. 44, as well as personal communication regarding the matter in the summer of 2014. The churches within Paliochora were omitted because they were explicitly excluded in the permits granted to the APKAS project.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 43-44. Many of these churches are built in the single-aisle barrel-vaulted architectural style, which was commonly used over a long period of time (13<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries) thus making analysis of these building difficult.

<sup>36</sup> While the majority of the churches were being catalogued for the APKAS database, a British team unaffiliated with APKAS was completing a survey of the town. APKAS has later been able to catalogue 5 churches that are located within the town, but there are other churches not yet incorporated into the database.

<sup>37</sup> The article previously cited by Johnson and Wilson provides further insight into what information is included in the APKAS database, including the forms that are filled out when a church is added to the database. This includes things such as elevation, suggested dates for the beginning and end of church usage, and presumed dates for multiple phases of construction. See also: Richard MacNeil. 2013. *The Greek Island of Kythera Jumps to the Forefront of Historical Research*.

<sup>38</sup> Timothy E Gregory. 2006. *Narrative of a Byzantine Landscape*. pg. 491. Gregory here argues that 13<sup>th</sup> century churches were built high upon hills, while 14<sup>th</sup> century churches were built with no discernable defensive purpose. However this theory is not absolute and there are some exceptions.

*vigla*. However, most of these churches are independent of any such auxiliary structure. This makes some of the churches harder to recognize as watchtower than it is for others. Nevertheless, their location in relation to nearby towns, roads, and coastlines suggests they still performed this function.

The first of these proposed *viglae* is Ayia Barbara, located west of the town of Metata. The reasoning for this conclusion is based on the observation that several meters opposite the church is a small tower.<sup>39</sup> This tower looks toward several smaller nearby towns, such as Dokana, Viaradika, and Mitata, as well as looks towards the port of Paliopoli. Presumably, soldiers or enlisted Kytheran peasants, stood guard in this tower and looked east into the valley. The church of Ayia Barbara is important for several reasons significant to this study. First, it is an example of religious and military functions being paired together. Although the church and tower were not combined into a single structure, their relation to one another clearly suggests that this church had a military usage. The church itself is placed in a strategic position between the Paliopoli and the plains of Potamos, but it is not located within any town, which begs the question of what use there was to build it in such isolation. While the church itself was probably not used as a lookout, because of the tower, it may have been used for some ancillary function, for example: a place for the nearest villagers to hide within. This connection between the church and tower, supports an argument that other churches on the island had some manner of military function.

This connection is made even more evident by the architectural features of Ayios Ioannes O Theologos (shown in figure-2), on a significant height just south of the beach of Phyri Ammos. There was a tower paired with this church; however, unlike the church of Ayia Barbara, this

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<sup>39</sup> Chatzidakis and Bitha. *op. cit.* pg. 110

tower was attached directly to the roof of the church itself. It is not certain whether the church and tower were built contemporaneously or at different periods. Nevertheless, this site was placed on the summit of a steep hill, where it could observe the beaches of Phyrri Ammos and Kobonada, and in fact much of the eastern coast of the island (exhibited in figure-3). This is a clear instance of a place of worship being used as a place of defense. Ayios Ioannes' position and adjoining tower indicate this auxiliary function.

The church Ayios Ioannes in Sanidia (located east of Potamos) was built in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century at an elevation of 274 meters, and was also paired with a contiguous tower.<sup>40</sup> Although much of the former *vigla* has been ruined, remnants of it still remain and are shown in figure-4. The tower was placed above a building adjacent to the church and part of the wall of the *vigla* can still be seen, as well as a window through which guards could have observed the surrounding area. This tower and location allows for one to observe the eastern coast of Kythera and look towards the beach of Ayia Pelagia. Ayios Ioannes is one of the best examples of a church with this sort of fortification serving as a *vigla* on the northern half of the island.

These three churches have specific architectural features that suggest they served the military function of a *vigla*. However, these sites are not nearly enough to fill the void left in northern Kythera and much of the landscape would thus remain defenseless. To explain this broader thesis additional *viglae* must be identified. There are several more churches that appear to have possible adjacent structures, but the evidence for these is indistinct and it is not certain these sites had defensive responsibilities. Rather, churches lacking these types of distinguishing architectural features must be considered as potential possibilities. The strategic locations of this subsequent group of churches suggests that they could indeed provide this function. In addition,

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<sup>40</sup> Chatzidakis and Bitha. *op. cit.* pp. 198-201.

while some of these churches served as *viglae* themselves, it has been argued that others may have been built upon the foundations of former *viglae*, or in close proximity to them.<sup>41</sup>

Ayios Demetrios at Sklere is one of these churches that may have served as a *vigla* despite lacking the architectural features previously discussed. It was constructed at an elevation of 427 meters, which is the highest of any church in the APKAS database. Sklere is located west of Aroniadika, and is protected by nearby mountains that make the church difficult to access. It also has views over the plains of Potamos as well as toward Paliochora. Equally important is the chronology of this church's foundation. The database dates this church to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; however, it has been argued that this site was occupied after the sack of Paliochora in 1537.<sup>42</sup> The church's construction so close to the date of this catastrophic event suggests that it was one of the Kytheran survivors' response to the Barbarossa's attack, as many of refugees fled west to the plain of Potamos.<sup>43</sup> If the church was built in the years before 1537 it still may have been constructed as a response to increased naval activity in the area, such an earlier Ottoman raid (like the one that occurred in 1519).<sup>44</sup>

After the destruction of Paliochora, a sizeable population remained living in its hinterland. Venetian census records show 1,850 people living on the island only 8 years after the attack, and this rose to 3,300 in 1553.<sup>45</sup> A Venetian official states that even as late as 1563 these

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<sup>41</sup> Timothy E. Gregory. 2006. "Landscape and Cultural History in Early Modern and Medieval Kythera." *VIIIth International Panionian Conference*. pg. 112.

<sup>42</sup> Gregory. 2008. *Sklere: A Place of Refuge after the Ottoman Sack of Kythera*. pg. 264. This article explains the possible fortification of Sklere in much greater detail than in this thesis, and includes several Venetian primary sources describing the state of Kythera after the attack.

<sup>43</sup> Gregory. *Sklere: A Place of Refuge after the Ottoman Sack of Kythera* 2006. *Narrative of a Byzantine Landscape*. pg. 489.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory. pg. 260. Citing Tsitsilias, P.K. 1993-1994. *Ηιστορία των Κυθηρών*.

<sup>45</sup> Leontsinis. *op. cit.* pg. 157. It has been argued by both Leontsinis and Maltezou that, after 1537, many of the refugees returned to willingly or was forced back to Kythera by the Venetians, who desired to repopulate the island. This perhaps accounts for the large population increase. However, these early census records do not appear to be completely accurate and should be regarded cautiously.



Kytherans still feared the potential return of a pirate fleet due to the lack of military security. After the sack of Paliochora the administrative center of the island moved south to the fortified town of Chora (along with it much of the population),<sup>46</sup> yet many survivors still occupied the small villages in the plains of Potamos. This is made evident by some of the towns still present in the interior of the island. Several of these villages, such as Triphyllianika, claim to be populated by the descendants of refugees from Paliochora.<sup>47</sup> But this is also supported by the reports of Venetian advisors, who were sent to review Kythera's circumstances after the attack. In 1545, one such report claimed that the people were living in the woods during the summer, too afraid to stay in one place.<sup>48</sup> This same adviser then suggested fortifying the area of Sklere. A different report mentioned that the Kytherans requested Venice rebuild the fortifications at Paliochora, thus indicating a substantial population remained in the area.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, Venice never rebuilt the castle at Paliochora (although at least one historian has argued that an attempt was made and the town was occupied well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century) and the people inhabiting the area remained vulnerable and unprotected.<sup>50</sup> The Republic did not have the means or desire to pay for the reconstruction and although they had some interest in the town, they did not invest in new defense. There are two possible reasons for this decision. First, the weaknesses of Paliochora's situation were revealed after the defeat in 1537. While the town was previously impenetrable to hostile forces, the introduction of canons made these defenses obsolete and the mountains located west of the town, where canons could be situated, made the

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<sup>46</sup> Gregory. 2007. "Contrasting Impressions of Land Use in Early Modern Greece: The Eastern Korinthia and Kythera." *Between Venice and Istanbul: Colonial Landscapes in Early Modern Greece*. pg. 188

<sup>47</sup> Timothy E Gregory and Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory. "The Central Northern Plain." In *The Archaeology of Kythera*. pg. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Gregory. 2008. *Sklere: A Place of Refuge after the Ottoman Sack of Kythera*. pg. 264. Citing the Report of Zuanne Soranzo (1545) in Sathas, 6,286-9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 262. Citing Lamansky, V. 1884. *Secrets d'etat de Venise*.

<sup>50</sup> G.D.R. Sanders. 1996. Two Kastro on Melos and Their Relationship in the Archipelago. pg. 158.

town especially vulnerable.<sup>51</sup> It is also likely that Venice wished to increase their focus on the suitable ports in the south. Venice's interests in commerce and on the connection to Crete support this possibility, as well as the increase in fortification in Avlemonas, Chora, and Mylopotamos (See figure-7 at the end of this paper for a map of Venetian "Cerigo").

Thus we must return our attention to the church Ayios Demetrios at Sklere, which was the place the Venetian adviser suggested new fortifications be built. The views towards the eastern shore and high elevation made this location desirable for a lookout post; especially if the islanders, who as suggested by the Venetian report, were now scattered across the island or hiding in the woods due to the prospect of future pirate raids.<sup>52</sup> Venice did not construct new defenses in this place either, but it appears that the Kytherans themselves attempted makeshift fortification by their own expenses and efforts.<sup>53</sup> If indeed the church was built soon after the fall of Paliochora (formerly known as Ayios Demetrios), dedicating this new site at Sklere to Ayios Demetrios may be suggestive of the relationship between Sklere and the refugees from the recently destroyed Kytheran town (whose official name was Ayios Demetrios). However, even if the church was built before the attack by Hayreddin Barbarossa, the small fortifications built around the church by the Kytherans are still indicative of the connection between churches and military function on the island of Kythera.

The northwestern coast of Kythera is much more rocky and inhospitable than other parts of the island. However, despite the terrain it is possible to enter the island through several small entrances. One of these routes into the island, is a valley that stretches from the towns of Dourianika and Perlegianika towards the sea and a small beach called Koufogialos. Placed above

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<sup>51</sup> Gregory. 2007. *Contrasting Impressions of Land Use in Early Modern Kythera: The Eastern Korinthia and Kythera*, pg. 195.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 262

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 266

this passage are two churches, Ayios Georgios at Dourianika and Ayios Andreas at Perlegianika. Both of these churches are placed on hills above 250 meters in elevation and were constructed at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>54</sup>

The first church, Ayios Georgios (built in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century), does not have any supplementary fortifications built with it.<sup>55</sup> However, its placement on a steep hill does make this position an adequate lookout post, as well as a suitable location to stop a corsair incursion before it reached the interior. The church's sightlines down into the valley and towards the beach make Ayios Georgios a likely *vigla*. Ayios Georgios is the church located furthest west along this ridge and thus is the first point of protection from any attack coming through this entrance into Kythera. Also suggestive of this function, besides its location and vantage point, is its proximity to Ayios Andreas.

Ayios Andreas is situated similarly to the church at Dourianika and looks into the same valley from a hill further inland. There are two structures attached to this church, which make this site an interesting case. The mostly easily identifiable of these is another church also dedicated to Ayios Georgios.<sup>56</sup> However, the second adjoined structure is more directly related to this focus of this study. Between these two churches is a small tower, which previous observers had argued was an additional church.<sup>57</sup> Chatzidakis and Bitha, however, argue that this structure was in fact not a church, but rather it was a two-story tower.<sup>58</sup> They do not propose a date for this building, as most of their estimations came from the analysis of frescos, nor do they argue a purpose for the structure. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that this tower was working

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<sup>54</sup> Dates per APKAS database and Chatzidakis and Bitha.

<sup>55</sup> Chatzidakis and Bitha. *op. cit.* pp. 134-141.

<sup>56</sup> APKAS attributes the date of construction for this second church as 1475 A.D.

<sup>57</sup> Chatzidakis and Bitha. *op. cit.* pg. 97.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 97.

similarly to those at Ayios Ioannes o Theologos and Ayia Barbara. This site may have served as a *vigla* on its own or worked in tandem with Ayios Georgios to communicate between Dourianika and the villages in the interior.

The churches of Ayios Polykarpos and Ayios Mamas are located farther north of Dourianika and Perlegianikaa. Although this section of Kythera's coastline is especially rocky and at times impenetrable, both of these churches protect potential entrances into the island. Each of them sits perched on a high hill looking into a ridge that runs from the inner spine of the island. Ayios Polykarpos has a view through a valley leading to the small beach named Ayios Leftheris (or Eleftherios) and over an ancient road that has been argued to have run nearby the church.<sup>59</sup> In addition, another church dedicated to Ayios Eleftherios (constructed in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and located north of the beach Lykodemou), guards this same passage that leads through the valley and into Potamos. This church, which is placed near the bottom of the valley, blocks the main western entrance to the interior of the island.<sup>60</sup> Ayios Mamas on the other hand, is placed upon a steep hill and has a commanding view over the surrounding territory, the Ionian Sea, and the small beach called Ocheles. This church, located in a valley north of Ayios Polykarpos and Ayios Eleftherios, also protects a series of small homes located further down the hill.<sup>61</sup>

Ayios Prokopios, on the other side of the island and situated on a hill above the port of Platia Ammos (in the northeast of the island), is another Byzantine era church that may have been used as a *vigla*. This building was built less than 100 meters above sea level; however, it is difficult to access due to the steep incline of the hill. Unlike the previous several churches in this

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 120, see figure-4 of Gregory's article.

<sup>60</sup> Personal communication with Timothy E. Gregory in the spring of 2015.

<sup>61</sup> These houses have not yet been definitely dated; however, many appear to be from later periods, such as the early-modern to modern periods.

study, Ayios Prokopios has no persevered adjacent building that could have been used as a watchtower. Nonetheless, its location high above Platia Ammos does suggest that it may have served a military purpose and its dedication to a military saint might support this conclusion. Below the church is the most important and accessible beach this far north on the island and positioned opposite this site is the town of Neapoli and Cape Malea. Ayios Prokopios thus would have played an important part in Kythera's defense by not only guarding the port of Platia Ammos, but also by patrolling the waterways between the island and the Peloponnese (see figure-8 for the view from Ayios Prokopios). This church would then be the first point of contact for any ship sailing from west to east through the Laconian Gulf.

The church Ayios Xestratigos at Vythoulas, similar to Ayios Prokopios, can be seen to protect Kythera's coastline.<sup>62</sup> This church stands at 240 meters above sea level and provides a clear view over the harbor of Ayia Pelagia and the coastline to the south as far as Diakofti. While there was presumably no significant settlement at Ayia Pelagia in the Middle Ages, as there is today, the harbor was likely used in some capacity as made evident by the two ancient roads leading down into the town.<sup>63</sup> Just like Ayios Prokopios, this church protected an important entrance into the island, while simultaneously guarding the sea lanes to the east and providing a timely warning system to the Kytherans in the immediate hinterland.

In this way, northern Kythera acquired a rudimentary defensive system. The villages located along the central spine of the island (most importantly Potamos) were protected by the surrounding churches. The churches of Ayios Mamas, Prokopios and Georgios (at Perlegianika and Dourianika), as well as the harsh and rocky terrain, guarded over the western coast of Kythera. On the Eastern coast, Ayios Prokopios and Xestratigos surveyed a series of more

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<sup>62</sup> As of today, the modern town of Vythoulas stands abandoned.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory. 2006. *Landscape and Cultural History in Medieval and Early Modern Kythera*. pg. 120, figure-4.

accessible beaches. Finally, Ayios Demetrios at Sklere beheld the plains around Potamos towards the destroyed town of Paliochora. By means of obligatory labor requirements, known as *corvée* labor, the Venetians required mandated citizens to occupy these *viglae* for the purpose of warning the rest of the island of an incoming pirate attack.<sup>64</sup>

It is not possible to be completely certain that every church listed above was used as a *vigla*. However, the evidence for several (for example, Ayios Ioannes at Phyri Ammos) suggests strongly that this was a common usage for Kytheran churches and this analysis can be extrapolated to other churches on the island. It is also possible that several other churches not listed in this study were used as watchtowers, or at least performed this service when the need for a lookout demanded such. Nevertheless, the churches accounted for in this study have more evidence signifying a defensive purpose than others within the APKAS survey zone, because of their positions above entrances into the island, additional defensive structures, or their location by important roads.

In addition to serving as watchtowers, there were other tangible defensive purposes that churches were used for on Kythera. Several of these buildings offered an area for shelter for people under the threat of attack. Many churches, such as Ayios Mamas, were built well outside of population centers and in areas difficult to access. This church in particular was built isolated and at a high elevation in the midst of challenging terrain and steep valleys. In fact, according to GIS spatial analysis, the periods between 950 and 1550 A.D. are especially characterized by their wide dispersal away from major population centers.<sup>65</sup> This phenomenon is in opposition to later

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<sup>64</sup> Gregory. 2006. *Landscape and Cultural History in Early Modern and Medieval Kythera*. pg. 111.

<sup>65</sup> Richard MacNeil. *Churches in Kythera: History and Evidence, GIS as a Heuristic Tool*. (Manuscript in preparation). pg. 7. In this article, MacNeil argues that the high level of dispersion may be the result of depopulation on Kythera. However, I believe that this assertion is in line with my arguments and may even support them. I have found that much of the defense for the northern half of the island to be placed in the hands of individual families and villagers, who were more interested in defending their own land rather than a town such as Potamos.

periods, where churches were built more frequently in the central plain around Potamos, perhaps due to increased presence of Venetian-period families looking to use the land for farming.<sup>66</sup>

These churches that were constructed upon tall hills and ridges that are not desirable places for the Kytheran population to participate in religious services, but rather to conceal themselves from violence. The placement of churches in this environment is a deterrent for pirates in itself; however, there were further advantages to constructing churches in such a manner.

A majority of the Byzantine era churches on Kythera are hidden from the sight of passing naval traffic. Figure-5, shown at the end of this paper, demonstrates the phenomenon of churches taking advantage of the rough landscape in order to remain hidden.<sup>67</sup> Only the areas on this map that are shaded in red can be seen from the sea, while the rest are obscured from view by the terrain. The fact that people built these churches close to this area in red, yet they remained outside of it, suggests that the Kytherans were cognitive of this fact when they were constructing these churches. In the same way, the churches may have built outside of major population centers under the same premise, that is to say that they knowingly constructed churches in places difficult to access for the purpose of remaining both out of the way of major targets and hidden from the view of others.

The locations and elevations of these sites also make them suitable positions to repel an enemy invasion or raid. Unfortunately, there are no definite examples of this occurrence outside of oral tradition. Nevertheless, the islanders themselves believe that the townspeople of Christophorianika (just southwest of Potamos) drove off a pirate incursion by meeting them for battle outside the church of Ayios Vasilios. The church was constructed in about 1600 and is

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Richard MacNeil. 2013. "The Greek Island of Kythera Jumps to the Forefront of Historical Research." *ArcNews Esri*.

located at the center of medieval town, which lies slightly west of modern Christophorianika.<sup>68</sup>

The people still dwelling in this village, as well as their relatives and descendants, maintain that the battle with pirates took place right outside of the church.<sup>69</sup> It is not possible with the given information to decide the plausibility of this event, nor if similar actions took place in other towns. Scarce literary sources limits the evidence for this possible use of churches; however, the fact that modern Kytherans believe that this church was used in the past as a defense against pirates is suggests that the idea of using churches as bases to ward off an attack was not an out of the ordinary concept. In addition, the fortifications around Ayios Demetrios at Sklere also suggest that churches were used in this way.

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<sup>68</sup> Per the APKAS Church database.

<sup>69</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Gregory in the summer of 2014.



## Chapter 4: Divine Protectors

Along with these aforementioned tangible aspects of defense, the people of Kythera believed that churches offered them divine protection. The phenomenon of anticipating assistance from saints is not exclusive to the island of Kythera and it is quite common in other areas, as will be briefly explored later in this study. The occurrence of divine protection is well manifested on the island and appears in several different ways. Kythera's churches are often dedicated to saints associated with the military or with other protective qualities. In addition to church dedications, this phenomenon is made evident through the many frescoes that still remain intact. There are many examples, both in written and oral history, about saints who directly intervened on behalf of the people living on the island. Although this is not the same kind of physical defense that has been discussed previously in this thesis, the Kytherans themselves believed that this saints offered palpable protection.

In Byzantine culture saints were frequently invoked so that they might intercede in times of danger. These holy protectors could have regional popularity or have universal notoriety.

White writes,

“In each case, the saint who interceded had a connection with the place or person in need of aid. Whether the saints were assisting their native cities or an individual who made the direct appeal, all of these incidents have a local personal character: there was a pre-existing relationship between the saints and their beneficiaries. Faith in personal and local patron saints, especially in times of war, did not end in late antiquity, and Demetrios, Theodore, and many others continued to be invoked by their namesake and the inhabitants of their native cities throughout the Middle Ages.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Monica White. 2013. *Military Saint in Byzantium and Rus: 900-1200*. pg. 64. See chapter 3 of this work for a fuller interpretation of the role of military saints and their important for the imperial army.

Two local Kytheran saints are popular on the island and commonly depicted, as well as those saints, who were the patrons of the people of the nearby Peloponnese. Nevertheless, most saints represented on the island (such as Demetrios, Theodoros, and Georgios) had trans-regional popularity and were common throughout the Eastern Christian world.<sup>71</sup> Both of these groups are manifested on Kythera, local patrons and universal military saints.

Another noticeable way these saints can be classified is by martyrdom. Many of the saints represented on the island (including the military saints, healers, and Kytheran saint Ayia Elesia) suffered this fate. In fact, White argues that the military saint identity stemmed originally from this martyr aspect.<sup>72</sup> Martyrs had special significance in the eyes of medieval Christians. These saints were supposed to be more powerful intermediaries between man and the divine, as they had shown themselves, “to be true servants of God, [who] could bind their fellow men even closer to God than could the angels.”<sup>73</sup> Peter Brown maintains that martyrs were so popular because their believers have a, “need for intimacy with a protector whom one could identify as a fellow human being.”<sup>74</sup> These saints served as patrons to Christians and had a special relationship with them. In the same way ascetic saints were popular on the island, perhaps because their persevering lifestyles substantiated their claims as intercessors of God.<sup>75</sup> They were seen as more

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 65.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Brown. 1981. *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. pg. 61. Citing Marcellus. *Carmen de Speciebus* 1-4. 624.

<sup>74</sup> Brown. *op. cit.* pg. 61. He introduces this discussion with a line from St. Augustine’s *the City of God*, “Let us take the benefits of God through him, our fellow servant.” Line: 57.

<sup>75</sup> Gregory. 2006. *Narrative of a Byzantine Landscape*. pg. 496.

relatable to the people worshipping them and although many lived withdrawn from society, the difficult and hard lives they experienced resonated with worshippers.<sup>76</sup>

The protection that these saints offered was localized around the particular church or monastery dedicated to them. On Kythera, there are at least three examples where this security was provided by the relics of saint: The Panayaia Myrtidiotissa, the church of Ayia Elesa, and monastery of Osios Theodoros (all of which will be discussed later). This phenomenon may be explain, in part, by the theory that the, “relics or bones of the saint were considered as both a source of healing and an agent which gave protection to the church which possessed them.”<sup>77</sup> There are both literary and oral sources of these locations being sources of miracles. Claudia Rapp writes that, “after a holy man’s death, all the participants in his cult, indeed all who invoked the saint in their prayers, could thus consider themselves his children,” and as such were under their protection.<sup>78</sup> Both the followers of Ayios Theodoros and Ayia Elesa buried their respective holy person and continued in reverence of them after their deaths.

The most noticeable way in which saints were invoked was through church dedications. Numerous churches on Kythera were dedicated to military saints, saints connected to protection from the sea, or saints connected to protection from disease. These buildings were often placed on hills or by the sea, much like the *viglae* that were covered in the previous chapter. Gregory argues this same theory, that churches were placed with “clear intent” at positions important for defense.<sup>79</sup> He also argues that each individual church and the saint associated with it were seen

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<sup>76</sup> Phillip Rousseau. 1999. *Ascetics as Mediators and as Teachers*. pp. 48-49.

<sup>77</sup> David Farmer. 2011. *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. pg. xi.

<sup>78</sup> Claudia Rapp. 1999. “For next to God, you are my salvation.” pp. 78-79.

<sup>79</sup> Gregory. 2006. *Landscape and Cultural History in Medieval and Early Modern Kythera*, pg. 112

as one and viewed as protectors of the surrounding territory.<sup>80</sup> Thus, these saints projected their divine power over the nearby villages and homesteads. While Gregory's article does provide multiple examples of how protection was understood and which saints were more associated with protection, this study endeavors to provide further examples of how this phenomenon was represented on Kythera.

APKAS argues that 38 churches within the survey area were constructed before 1537 and the ruin of Paliochora. Of this set of churches nine are dedicated to military saints, including: Ayios Geogrios, Demetrios, Xestratigos, and Prokopios. All of these saints are depicted in military attire and performing martial actions. These particular saints have been alleged by Orthodox Christians throughout the Byzantine world to intercede on behalf suppliants and protect them from danger. These military saints may have been so prevalent on the island, because of the hostile circumstances Kythera so often faced from pirate incursions.<sup>81</sup>

The prominence held by military saints is evident in the example of Ayios Georgios Kolokythias, located above the harbor of Ayia Patrikia. According to the APKAS database Ayios Georgios was constructed at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This date is noteworthy because it suggests that this church was the second constructed on the island following its resettlement in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>82</sup> This church was founded less than 100 years after the first new settlers were said to have arrived from Monemvasia. The threat of pirate raids and previous abandonment of the island would have remained part of recent memory and the new inhabitants would have quickly made plans to defend themselves.

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> APKAS argues that the first new church built on the island was the monastery Osios Theodoros constructed in the year 950 A.D.

The church itself is placed in a favorable location, raised 71 meters above the small port at Ayia Patrikia and towards the beach Ayia Pelagia. The church was also placed at the summit of a hill thus controlling the nearby coastline. While this position may have provided some actual security by serving as a watchtower or strong hold, the church also provided divine protection for the new inhabitants. It is suggestive that the first church built on this part of the island and at an important strategic position, was dedicated to powerful and well-known military saint.

A similar situation appears in the town of Paliochora, which was named after Ayios Demetrios. The town itself is placed between a series of cliffs and gorges that run towards the coast. Paliochora is also well positioned within a series of natural defense, some of which are shown in figure-6 below, and is hidden from the sight of passing-by ships. Similarly to Kolokithias, Paliochora was clearly fortified with the intent of taking advantage of the landscape and named after a famous military saint. In addition, after the fall of Paliochora to the Ottomans, as previously mentioned, a church was constructed near Sklere dedicated to Ayios Demetrios. In both of these situations, where there was an obvious focus on defense, an important settlement was named after a powerful military saint.

Military saints are also prominently depicted in the frescoes of these churches. For example, the main church in the Byzantine town of Paliochora had paintings of both Ayios Georgios and Ayios Demetrios.<sup>83</sup> Also located within this church is a fresco of Ayios Nikolaos, who is frequently depicted within Kytheran churches. Ayios Nikolaos was most famous for his protection of sailors and became popular on islands that suffered from the Arab raids occurring between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>84</sup> He is remarkably popular on the Kythera and is well

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<sup>83</sup> Chatzidakis and Bitha. *op. cit.* pg. 110.

<sup>84</sup> Caraher. *op. cit.* pg. 271. Oikonomides compares the miracles of Osios Theodoros to those of Ayios Nikolaos in line 2. Caraher also cites Sevchenko, I. and Sevchenko. 1984. *The Life of St. Nicholas of Sion*.

represented by the frescoes of many churches, as well as by at least two church dedications (that are within the timeframe of this study A.D. 950-1537).<sup>85</sup> One of these churches, which is also one of the very few early-Christian churches known on the Kythera, sits isolated at the very north of the island and presumably protects the many ships passing by. The church Ayios Georgios at Dourianika has depictions of Ayioi Xestratigos, Georgios, Nikolaos, and Artemis, all of whom are military saints or saints associated with naval protection.<sup>86</sup> Many frescoes portray the saints as side-by-side or within the same panel and the placement of saints in this manner symbolizes their combined efforts to keep the island safe from attack.

Another prevalent group of saints on the island are those who were popular in southern Greece. Although these saints were not directly associated with the military, they shared similar characteristics and were known to protect the people of the Peloponnese. Historically, the northern part of the island was closely connected with southern Greece due to political relationships with Sparta and Monemvasia. One example of this connection is the architectural features of many Kytheran churches, which are comparable to those in Monemvasia,<sup>87</sup> as well as the frescoes, which are similar to those in the Mani.<sup>88</sup> Many of the first settlers of Kythera after the arrival of Osios Theodoros migrated from the Peloponnese and continued their devotion to their patron saints.

Ayios Nikon is one such example of this type of saint. Ayios Nikon is the patron saint of the region of Laconia, which is an area where many of the families repopulating the island would have arrived from. According to APKAS, the church dedicated to Ayios Nikon at Zaglanikianika

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<sup>85</sup> Per the APKAS church database. Additionally, the modern town of Avlemonas was called Ayios Nikolaos in the medieval period.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 136.

<sup>87</sup> Leontsinis. *op. cit.* pg. 33.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou -Gregory. *op cit.* pg. 52.

was constructed around the year 1200 A.D. only about 200 years after the island become re-inhabitable. This saint was known as, “an important defender of Byzantine culture and territory against the dangers of their age, including military threats, incursions of non-Christians, and the real difficulties of rough and inhospitable landscapes.”<sup>89</sup> Thus new Peloponnesian settlers of Kythera looked to their patron saint for protection.

In the same way, the Kytherans may have dedicated a church to Ayios Andreas at Perlegianika (and another 10<sup>th</sup> century church at Livadi) in order to invoke his protection. This church was constructed in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and is attached to another church Ayios Georgios, which was mentioned previously. Ayios Andreas was geographically connected to the Peloponnese through his rescue of the city of Patras, where he was originally martyred and buried, from a joint Arab and Slavic siege.<sup>90</sup> Although most of the new settlers would not have been arriving from Patras this story would have been known to them, as well as the protective aspects of Ayios Andreas.

One of Kythera’s most important saints, Osios Theodoros, also has a close connection to mainland Greece. He was born in the town of Koroni, raised by the *protopapas* of Nauplion, and spent several years living in Monemvasia before moving to Kythera.<sup>91</sup> His story is contemporary and similar to *the Life of Ayios Nikon*, as both were ascetics who spent their time in southern Greece during the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>92</sup> In addition, *the life of Osios Theodoros* was written by a man

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<sup>89</sup> Gregory, Timothy E. and Lita Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. “The Central Northern Plain: Trifyllianika, Osios Theodoros, Georgadika.” *The Archaeology of Kythera*. pg. 2. Along with Osios Theodoros and Osios Loukas of Stiris, all of whom lived in Greece during the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>90</sup> Herrin. 1972. “Byzantine Kythera.” *Coldstream and Huxley*, pg. 44

<sup>91</sup> Caraher. *op. cit.* pg. 269.

<sup>92</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. *The Central Northern Plain: Trifyllianika, Osios Theodoros, Georgadika*. pg. 2. In this article, Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory point out that the connection between these two saints may also be made evident by the relative proximity of the monastery Osios Theodoros, south of Logothetianika, and Ayios Nikon outside of Zaglanikianika. William Caraher in his article also connects *the Life of Osios Theodoros* with *the Life of Theoktiste of Lesbos* by Niketas Magistros.

named Leo, who may have been from Monemvasia, and, “[His] familiarity with the saint and the local environment allowed him to produce a *life* that resonated deeply with the political, religious, and literary life of the Middle Byzantine southern Peloponeese.”<sup>93</sup> Osios Theodoros is commonly portrayed as the protector of the island, because he is so closely connected with its resettlement in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

According to *the Life of Osios Theodoros*, the saint left his wife and children traveling around Italy and southern Greece in order to find a suitable place to live a harsh monastic life.<sup>94</sup> He was eventually led to Kythera, where he believed he would be able to live a more severe form of asceticism, and he obtained passage to the island along with his friend and fellow monk, Antonios.<sup>95</sup> This journey was previously too dangerous to make, until a Byzantine fleet cleared the waters during a campaign against Cretan Arabs.<sup>96</sup> The island itself was occupied by shipwrecked Arab pirates, who were recently defeated by the same Byzantine fleet.<sup>97</sup> He spent his remaining years on the island in the early Christian church of Ayioi Sergius and Bacchus, perhaps unaware the pirates were on the island, and the Arab raiders never harmed the saint. This event is also an example of divine protection on Kythera, as Ayioi Sergios and Bacchus were considered patrons of the military and the church preserved Osios Theodoros from danger. In addition to this miracle, Osios Theodoros is also noted for the miraculous preservation of this body following his death<sup>98</sup> and the foreseeing the exact day of his own death.<sup>99</sup> Finally, and

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<sup>93</sup> Caraher. *op. cit.* pg. 268. Citing Kalligas, H. 1990. *Byzantine Monemvasia: The Sources, Monemvasia.* pp. 62-63.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 269.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory, pg. 37.

<sup>98</sup> Caraher. *op. cit.* pg. 270.

<sup>99</sup> Gregory, Timothy E. *A Short Archaeological History of Kythera*, pg. 37. Citing Oikonomides: lines 237-239, which tell Osios Theodoros wrote on a tile he would die on May 12<sup>th</sup>.



although not included in *the Life of Osios Theodoros*, the saint performed many other miracles of protection, including changing all the venomous snakes into non-poisonous snakes.

Two churches within the APKAS survey area dedicated to this important Kytheran saint. This first of these is the 10<sup>th</sup> century monastery nearby the town of Logothetianika, which was the first church built after the resettlement of the island. This church is built on top of the foundations of the early Christian church dedicated to Ayioi Sergios and Bacchus, both of whom were important military saints. The second church is built upon a ridge called Spasteras and its elevation of 388 meters makes it one of the highest churches accounted for in the APKAS database. While this place may have been a good place for Kytherans to hide away during attack, it was certainly also a place believed to be under the protection of Osios Theodoros.

The protective qualities of this saint are shown explicitly in a fresco that was painted inside the church at Spasteras. In this painting, Osios Theodoros is shown holding the castle of Kythera at Chora/Kapsali in his hand (see figure-9 for a similar representation of this).<sup>100</sup> This fresco clearly symbolizes Osios Theodoros' role as caretaker of the island, which he accomplished both by making it prosperous and by protecting it from external threats. This painting is indicative of the idea that on Kythera saints were believed to be present within these churches and were real defenders of the island. In addition to Spasteras, Osios Theodoros is depicted in Ayios Demetrios in Paliochora,<sup>101</sup> as well as Ayios Barbara,<sup>102</sup> which had important defensive responsibilities and was paired with a tower.

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<sup>100</sup> Chatzidakis and Bitha, *op. cit.* pg. 187.

<sup>101</sup> It is not certain that this church is in fact dedicated to Saint Demetrios. The church is referred to in Chatzidakis and Bitha as A. Demetrios-Anonymous pg. 98. However, it has been suggested that this church could have been named as so, because of its location at the top of the city and because no other church in the town was dedicated to the saint.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 110.

Even churches not dedicated to military saints, or saints associated with southern Greece could have protective characteristics. On the one hand, these remaining groups of churches are filled with representations of military saints. For example, the church Ayios Kyriake (located between Ayios Ioannes at Sanidia and Ayios Niketas) has wall paintings depicting Ayios Theodoros, Georgios, Demetrios, and Niketas, all of whom are major military saints.<sup>103</sup> These saints show up in churches dedicated to a great variety of saints, quite possibly because of the potential protective actions they perform. On the other hand, healing saints such as Ayios Vlasios and the Anargyroi (Damian and Kosmas) are commonly depicted both through frescoes and church dedications. These divine persons were known for their abilities to keep people healthy and free from disease. Although this is not the same kind of protection provided by military saints, these figures were believed to have actual tangible effects on island life.

Similarly, churches dedicated to Mary are quite common on Kythera, as they are elsewhere throughout the Christian world, because she shared some of the protective aspects of both military and healer saints. Mary is often invoked through dedications, wall painting, and personal icons. There are two specific instances in which Mary has been thought to directly influence the wellbeing of the island and its inhabitants. The first of these is the famous icon Panayia Myrtidiotissa (Our lady of the Myrtle), which has been profoundly important to the people of Kythera. The icon was “discovered” in the early Venetian period by a local shepherd.<sup>104</sup> The icon’s first miracles were a series of movements away from whichever churches the Kytherans attempted to place it in, to travel back to where it was initially found.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Chatzidakis and Bitha. *op. cit.* pg. 219.

<sup>104</sup> Stavros Paspalas. *The Panagia Myrtidiotissa: the Changing Image of a Kytheran Icon*. Referencing periods argued by Chappet (1912), Kasimates (1983), Charalampides (2002), Lourantes (2003). pg. 200. And the discovery of the icon by a “humble shepherd” is mentioned on the same page.

<sup>105</sup> At this location in western Kythera, a monastery was eventually built in honor of Panayia Myrtidiotissa, where the icon remains today.

Eventually, the icon performed more important miracles of healing and protection, three of which are depicted across the bottom of the image. The healing of a crippled man and protection of the castle at Chora from a lightning bolt are both illustrated.<sup>106</sup> The monastery at Myrtidiotissa is also believed to have turned away a pirate fleet before it could reach and loot the island (see figure-10 for an imitation of this icon).

Another example of the protective aspect of Mary is the church Panayia tou Forou in Paliochora. During the Ottoman attack in 1537, this church was reported to shelter many of the townspeople fleeing the attack.<sup>107</sup> It did so when the entrance into the church became extremely hot, thus keeping the invaders from entering the building. Much of Kytheran tradition, in respect to this event, was passed down through folk lore and oral tradition. However, there is a written description of the attack in *Memorie dell' Isola di Cerigo*; however, it describes very little about the event other than the fact that it occurred. This chronicle states, "*Il terzo castell e de San Dimitri, qual fu expugnato ruinato al tempo delle guerre passate per infedlli.*"<sup>108</sup>

As mentioned, other than this source, most depictions of the event were carried down through folklore. One such depiction was written in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and made use of the various oral history and popular myth on Kythera. This pamphlet was written centuries after the event and is not intended to be an accurate historical representation; nevertheless, it does provide some interesting impressions on the Kytheran people viewed divine protection. This account states, "the Kytherans feel safe and secure, because God and the Panayia protect them on their

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<sup>106</sup> Paspalas. *op. cit.* pg. 200.

<sup>107</sup> Timothy Gregory and Lita Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. "Paliochora: The Byzantine 'Capital' of Ayios Demetrios." *The Archaeology of Kythera*. pg. 6. This church remains active even today. Once a year, on the anniversary of the attack, the townspeople of Triphyllianika celebrate mass in this building.

<sup>108</sup> Sathas. *op. cit.* pg. 278. "The third castle of Saint Demetri, which had been attacked and ruined at the time by previous wars by the infidels."

impenetrable rock.”<sup>109</sup> This passage supports the argument that Kytherans understood divine figures to be at least partially responsible for their safety.

Finally, there is at least one additional saint that had important defensive implications for the island. The fourth century saint, Ayia Elesa, similarly to Osios Theodoros, was a saint venerated only on Kythera. Her story is related in a *synaxarion*, which is a compilation of saints’ biographies, as well as their feast days.<sup>110</sup> Ayia Elesa was the daughter of noble parents, a pagan named Helladious and a Christian named Eugenia, who was unable to conceive and until her prayers to God were finally answered.<sup>111</sup> Sometime after the death of her mother and the after her father proposed she marry, Ayia Elesa fled with several followers to a once again abandoned Kythera, in order that she might live an ascetic and chaste life.<sup>112</sup> Her father followed her to the island, eventually beating her to death in a fit of rage.<sup>113</sup> Ayia Elesa miraculously rose from the dead, only to have Helladious pursue her one again, this time beating her with a rock and removing her head.<sup>114</sup> One of Ayia Elesa’s companions buried her body high on the mountain (names St. Elesa) where she was murdered, and related the miracles of the saint to those on the mainland. This lead travelers from southern Greece to visit her grave and venerate the saint on account of her now famous miracles.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> George Koksma. *The Tale of Palichora*. This short pamphlet can be found at the web address of the Kytheran Society of California.

<sup>110</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. *op. cit.* pg. 31.

<sup>111</sup> Laura Layne. 2013. “The Hagiological Study of the Biography of Ayia Elesa.” pg. 6. This interesting thesis was written by a former student of the Ohio State University. It does give a short summary of the life of Saint Elesa; however, it is mostly a literary analysis of Ayia Elesa’s *vita*. In this study, she explores several themes and characteristics of the saint, including: martyrdom and asceticism. In addition, Ayia Elesa’s name is derived from the Greek word ἔλεος, meaning mercy, perhaps in connection with her miraculous birth.

<sup>112</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. *op. cit.* pg. 31.

<sup>113</sup> Luke Gorton and Kyle Shimoda. 2013. “The Vita of Ayia Elesa,” (Unpublished Translation). 15.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>115</sup> Layne. *op. cit.* pg. 7.

The account and veneration of Ayia Elesa has several similarities to the *life* of Osios Theodoros, and also has important implications for the divine protection of Kythera. Like Osios Theodoros, Ayia Elesa left her family in order to travel to Kythera and live the life of an ascetic. She, like Osios Theodoros, was known for her protection from snakes, as she resurrected a man that had been bitten by a poisonous snake.<sup>116</sup> In addition, she was buried in the same location where she died. Most importantly, Ayia Elesa comes to the island during a period of abandonment and her arrival is associated with the revival of the island. Her role as guardian and protector is seen in the following two passages:

[her] shrine is well-made of marvels for those who come with faith, since the Saint's name is well-known, and many came from wealthy places, and they celebrated Her memory (on the first of the month of August, since she was beheaded on that day) and they received many good deeds and favors of deliverance from the Saint, and little by little they settled on that island, and with the aid of the Saint, in a little time that entire island became settled by a multitude of people, and all were gathered together for the memory of the Saint with lamps and fragrances, extolling her and singing hymns in the assembly for her; and they were fortunate and blessed Christians, who came with faith to bow before the holy and honorable martyred virgin Elesa, and they showed all of their pity at her holy shrine, and the Saint herself favored them in return, and from then on all of them had a protector and guardian on that island, and all who came with faith received what they sought, their deliverance in favor and treatment; because of this we wrote of her holy martyrdom for her faith, and they strengthened the common bond of the Christians.<sup>117</sup>

and,

The martyr Elesa, possessing the power of the Cross in her hands, and faith as a breastplate, and a large shield, and love as a bow, conquered bravely the vengeance of the tyrants and ignored the villainy of the demons, and having lost her head, she attained the first honor to save our souls in Christ.

The system of the people of Cythera there, with the celebrated singers, we will applaud the virgin martyr, all-faithful in Christ, we, speaking with favor, she having left behind the world, and the delights of the world, and having yearned for Christ, she, taking the flowers of excellence with blessings in her hands, and standing beside Christ, she, being victorious as the dove, being golden in her soul, illuminating the island with blessings for the awestruck people, for they faithfully run to your temple so you may treat them ungrudgingly for their various illnesses; because we call out to you, Holy Martyr of Christ, Elesa, renowned by all, first in

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* Remember here that it was later Osios Theodoros, who later made the snakes of Kythera non-poisonous.

<sup>117</sup> Gorton and Shimoda. *op. cit.* 15.

rank, to ask that those honoring you be ransomed from difficulties by your love, and that our souls be saved.<sup>118</sup>

The *synaxarion* that relates Ayia Elesa's story was written sometime between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>119</sup> with 1847 being the date argued by at least one historian.<sup>120</sup> Perhaps this delay in composing the story of Ayia Elesa accounts for some of the similarities to the *life* of Osios Theodoros. Her story may have been conveyed through the preceding centuries mostly through oral tradition<sup>121</sup> and may have picked up some aspects of Osios Theodoros' story. Oral tradition and folklore have been discussed briefly several times in this study, for example in the instance of Paliochora and Panayia tou Forou, or the supposed ghosts (*fantasmata*) that are still roaming the city today.<sup>122</sup> Laura Layne argues that in Kytheran culture, folklore is recognized as valid and factual.<sup>123</sup> Thus, it is important to understand that the saints discussed throughout this chapter were perceived to provide real protection for the island.

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<sup>118</sup> Gorton and Shimoda. *op. cit.* 18.

<sup>119</sup> Layne. *op. cit.* pg. 9. She makes this argument mostly due to the nature of the Medieval Greek used.

<sup>120</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. pg. 31. Which is the date of the earliest known text of Ayia Elesa.

<sup>121</sup> Layne. *op. cit.* pg. 11.

<sup>122</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. "Paliochora" *The Archaeology of Kythera*. pg. 7.

<sup>123</sup> Layne. *op. cit.* pg. 12. Citing Vansina, Jan. 1985. *Oral Tradition as History*. pgs. 99-106.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study has mostly focused on the periods after the resettlement of the island initiated by Osios Theodoros and prior to the sack of Paliochora in 1537. At the same time it had focused especially on the APKAS survey area, which consists of the land between the towns of Aroniadika and Ayia Anastasia. As aforementioned this decision to focus on northern was in large part due to the APKAS database and literature related to the survey. However, this was also because the island has been argued to have two distinct halves and it seemed to unsuitable to analyze the island as a whole with the resources available.<sup>124</sup> The churches of the southern part of the island should be analyzed in the same way. This will be difficult to do until the churches here are researched and catalogued in a similar way. Nevertheless, some general theories can be made regarding this area.

On the one hand, I would argue that churches being used as *viglae* would not be as necessary in southern Kythera. The fortifications of Mylopotamos, Kapsali/Chora, and Avlemonas protected this half of the island for much of the medieval period and thus there would be less reliance on churches.<sup>125</sup> The church at Phyri Ammos, does challenge this theory as this church was one of the best examples of *viglae*. This sample size is not large enough to make any definitive conclusions however, and only when more accurate information is available can this hypothesis be investigated further.

On the other hand, the expectation of divine intervention was certainly expected on the rest of Kythera, as the phenomenon was part of a larger Byzantine Christian culture. The few

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<sup>124</sup> Leontsinis and Gregory have argued this point, albeit hesitantly. Historically, the two halves of the island have been pulled by different cultural influences. At the same time a slightly different accent and dialect is spoken by Kytherans from different part of the island. Even today some islanders still feel there is some cultural divide between the northern and southern Kytheran people. Also, as previously discussed in this study, northern Kythera did experience different political circumstances under the Venieri governors.

<sup>125</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. *op. cit.* pg. 54.

churches in Chatzidakis and Bitha that are located in the south do have depictions of and dedications to the saints we have discussed as important in this study. Judith Herrin also identifies the churches of Ayios Demetrios at Pourko, Ayios Andreas at Leibadi, and Ayios Nikolaos at Moligates (all towns in the south) as being within the times periods discussed.<sup>126</sup> We have also considered the fresco of Osios Theodoros holding the castle of Chora in his hand, a location in the southern part of the island.

The occurrence of churches and saint performing these military functions must be looked at beyond the island of Kythera. It is important to understand if this usage of churches as *viglae* was a purely Kytheran phenomenon, or if it appeared in other regions. The most suitable areas to potentially study would be Crete, the southern Peloponnese, and other Ionian island. One would expect to find similarities to these places due not only to geographic proximity, but also strong economic and political ties. This study will look briefly at the peninsula of Methana to investigate if similar qualities emerge.

Theodore Koukoulis published a collection of the churches located in Methana, which is a peninsula located in the Peloponnese.<sup>127</sup> His work in Methana provided substantial inspiration for the APKAS survey and its own catalogue of churches.<sup>128</sup> Koukoulis studied 27 churches, 9 of which are dated to the Byzantine and Venetian periods and therefore contemporaneous with the churches analyzed on Kythera thus far. To formulate these dates Koukoulis took into account the characteristics of the frescoes, as well as inscriptions and architectural features that were able to be accurately associated to a certain period. This sample size is smaller than that of Kythera and

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<sup>126</sup> Herrin. 2013. "Byzantine Kythera." *Margins and Metropolis*. pg. 141.

<sup>127</sup> Theodore Koukoulis. 1997. *Catalogue of Churches*. pp. 211-256.

<sup>128</sup> Timothy E. Gregory. 2003. "Churches, Landscape, and the Population of Northern Kythera in Byzantine and Early Modern Times," *First International Conference of Kytheran Studies*. pg. 1.



Methana had much different historical circumstances; however, it does appear some similarities appear on the peninsula, at least in this brief treatment of its churches.

Methana and Kythera do have several geographic features and historical circumstances that are comparable. Both places are difficult and sometimes harsh environments, especially Methana, which is described as a “rough and rocky place” with very little flat land and natural water sources.<sup>129</sup> Recent archaeological evidence maintains that Methana remained under the control of the Byzantine Empire during the Slavic incursions of the 9<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>130</sup> while Kythera on the other hand was most abandoned during this period. Around the time of Osios Theodoros was traveling to Kythera in the 10<sup>th</sup> century it has also been suggested Ayios Nikon visited Methana.<sup>131</sup> These two saints share several characteristics, which is perhaps why their churches were located so close to each other on Kythera.<sup>132</sup> Although Methana was relatively unaffected by the Slavic incursions, the peninsula certainly felt the pressure of raids in later periods by the Frankish crusaders, Catalans, and Ottomans.<sup>133</sup> These attacks would have created a similar situation to what was experienced on Kythera, and thus we can make some comparisons to the use of churches as defensive structures and the use of saints as divine protectors.

There is a small fort located on the entrance to the peninsula, but there was no additional fortifications present.<sup>134</sup> The protection for the rest of the peninsula may have been the responsibility of the churches that were located around the northern shore. There are several churches on Methana that were placed in suitable positions to view the naval traffic passing

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<sup>129</sup> Peter James, Michael Atherton, Adrian Harvery, Anna Firmin, and Angela Morrow. 1997. *The Physical Environment of Methana: Formation, Exploitation, and Change*. pg. 5.

<sup>130</sup> Theodore Koukoulis. 1997. *Medieval Methana*. pg. 92.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* Citing Lampsidis, O. *Ο εκ Ποντιου Οσιοσ Νικων ο Μεταειτε*. (1982).

<sup>132</sup> Gregory and Tzortozopoulou-Gregory. *The Central Northern Plain*. pg. 2.

<sup>133</sup> E.A. Zachariadou.. 1983. *Trade and Crusade: Venetian Crete and the Emirates of Menteshe and Aydin*. pp. 41-42, 160. And, 1989. *Holy War in the Aegean during the 14<sup>th</sup> century*. pg. 217.

<sup>134</sup> Koukoulis. 1997. *Catalogue of Churches*. pg. 164.

through the straits between Agkistri and Egina. However, in *the Catalogue of Churches* no church is built with any watchtowers attached to it or nearby it. At the same time many of the Byzantine era churches were not built on high elevations, like they are on Kythra. Thus, while some churches may have served as *viglae* the evidence available does not suggest such and only with additional research can this phenomenon be illuminated.

There are much better examples of churches on Methana that are representative of the divine protection these saints were supposed to offer. There are at least three Byzantine era churches dedicated to the powerful military saints previously mentioned: Ayios Georgios, Xestratigos, and Theodoros.<sup>135</sup> There is also a church dedicated to the Panayia and another located very close to the coast dedicated to Ayios Nikolaos, whose important characteristics are evident on Kythra.<sup>136</sup> The other churches are dedicated to Saint John the Theologian and Forerunner, and Ayios and Zoodochos and Ayioi Asomatoi.<sup>137</sup>

These powerful military or protective saints are also commonly depicted in the frescoes of Methana's Byzantine churches. Unfortunately, many of the wall painting in these churches have been whitewashed over throughout the previous centuries. Because of this, few comparisons can be made with these frescoes, as with the names of the churches themselves. The church of Ayios Xestratigos has depictions of Theodoros and two of Georgios,<sup>138</sup> while the church Ayios Ioannes o Theologos has a painting of Ayios Georgios.<sup>139</sup> Beyond these two sites *the Catalogue of Churches* provides no more insight about the important military saints and healers that might have been revered in Methana. This is not an indication of the work compiled

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<sup>135</sup> Koukoulis. 1997. *Catalogue of Churches*. Figures MC 2, 5, and 14, respectively. There is perhaps a fourth dedicated to Ayios Demetrios but this church has not been dated with certainty.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* Figure MC 20 and 24.

<sup>137</sup> These last two last two saints do not appear in any of the churches on Kythra.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 224-232.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 219-221.

by T. Koukoulis but rather it is due to the damaged condition of the frescoes themselves, which were not well preserved.

Because of the corrupted nature of the evidence and the small sample size any similarities are not enough to be conclusive. Much like the case of southern Kythera, additional research will be required to make more definitive arguments about Methana. Hopefully this study furthers the understanding of the protective qualities of churches and the associated saints, as well as introduces the concept of churches serving a defensive purpose as *viglae*.

Briefly, we must return this study to Kythera and its churches to discuss some other viable explanations for their uses and locations. Primarily, these “sacred spaces” are places of worship for the people of Kythera.<sup>140</sup> They occupied this religious role first and foremost; nevertheless, it is not uncommon for churches on the island, and elsewhere, to be used for multiple purposes. For example, a trial was held in 1809 outside the Church of the Crucified Cross in Chora. The magistrate then punished the guilty party soon after and in the same place.<sup>141</sup> Thus, this church was used for a political purpose as a sort of court house. Additionally, churches also had social functions, as they were centers for village life and provided an area for community meetings.

These churches could also be used as place markers, used both by the government and by private individuals. The Venetian government applied them to divide the island’s 7 *distretti* (districts) into *parochiae* (parishes).<sup>142</sup> These *parochiae* were then used as centers for Venice’s census keeping. The priest running the parish church was responsible for collecting census

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<sup>140</sup> Gregory. 2003. *Churches, Landscape, and the Population of Northern Kythera in Byzantine and Early Modern Times*. pg. 2.

<sup>141</sup> Gregorios Logothetis. 1780-1817. *Kytherian Chronicle of Father Gregorios Logothetis*. Translated by Hariklia Castrisios in 2008. A copy of this chronicle can be accessed here: <http://www.kythera-family.net>

<sup>142</sup> Gregory. 2003. *Churches, Landscape, and the Population of Northern Kythera in Byzantine and Early Modern Times*. pg. 4.

information for the government at Chora and was then fined accordingly should he not comply.<sup>143</sup> It must also be noted that most of the churches in Kythera were privately owned and privately built (meaning they will built by either individuals or individual families), and this phenomenon may have had a significant impact on when and where these churches were constructed. The families owning these churches may have established them as a symbol of their control and their ownership of the surrounding land.<sup>144</sup> An example of this is the church Ayios Menas, supposedly built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The people of Aroniadika built this church on the top of a hill to the east of the town, so that they designate the fields below Ayios Menas as their own.<sup>145</sup>

These various functions do not contradict the military and protective roles a church could have, rather they indicate the variety of different services they could provide. For example, Ayios Menas may have been used as a place marker for the fields below and as a place of worship, but it may also have had a military function as well. The church was constructed initially because the fields below it had to be temporarily abandoned due to the immediate threat of piracy.<sup>146</sup> Thus, Ayios Menas' location on top of a hill, its position facing the port of Diakofti, and its constructing during a time of relative vulnerability suggests that it may have had this additional auxiliary purpose. Some churches may have been used as *viglae* only when immediate distress necessitated such, while others may have built with the expectation it would provide a protective function after its completion.

The northern half of Kythera was especially vulnerable to minor sea raids and larger scale invasions throughout the medieval period. At the same time it was often forsaken by its various

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 7.

<sup>145</sup> Gregory, *Narrative of a Byzantine Landscape*. pg. 491.

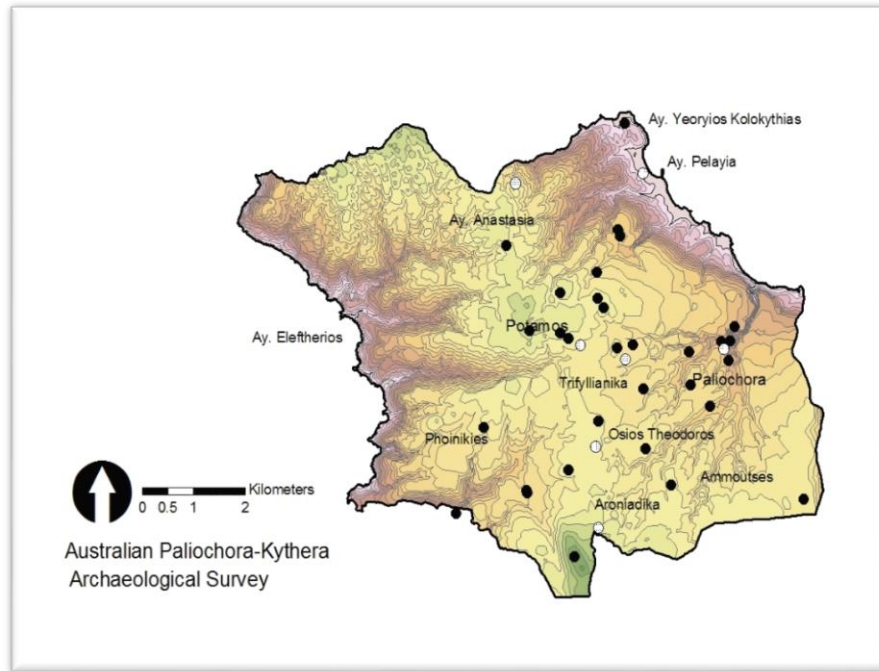
<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

governors, who focused on the suitable ports in the south. The islanders responded by using their churches as *viglae* to guard major passageways. In fact, it has been argued that many churches were built on top of the foundations of former *viglae*, which suggests that they were interchangeable.<sup>147</sup> Perhaps churches replaced *viglae* in order to acquire that additional aspect of divine protection, as buildings placed in strategic locations were also accompanied by depictions of powerful military and healing saints. These phenomena certainly appeared on the island of Kythera and continued research in this topic may reveal additional locations where it occurred. Specifically the churches in the Mani, Monemvasia, and former Venetian holdings such as Corfu, should be analyzed in light of these new findings. In addition, this thesis attempts to contribute to the APKAS project and its own analysis of Kythera's churches. They have thoroughly studied the chronology of these churches, as well as their relative locations to villages, roads, and other churches. This study hopes to contribute to this work by providing possible explanations of why several specific churches were constructed when and where they were.

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<sup>147</sup> Gregory. 2006. *Landscape and Cultural History in Medieval and Early Modern Kythera*. pg. 112.

## Figures



**Figure-1:** The churches APKAS argues to be built within 950-1537 A.D.<sup>148</sup>



**Figure 2:** The Church of Ayios Ioannes above Phyri Ammos<sup>149</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Gregory. 2006. *Landscape and Cultural History in Medieval and Early Modern Kythera*. pg. 121.

<sup>149</sup> Photograph by Timothy E. Gregory



**Figure-3:** The view from Ayios Ioannes o Theologos at Phryi Ammos<sup>150</sup>



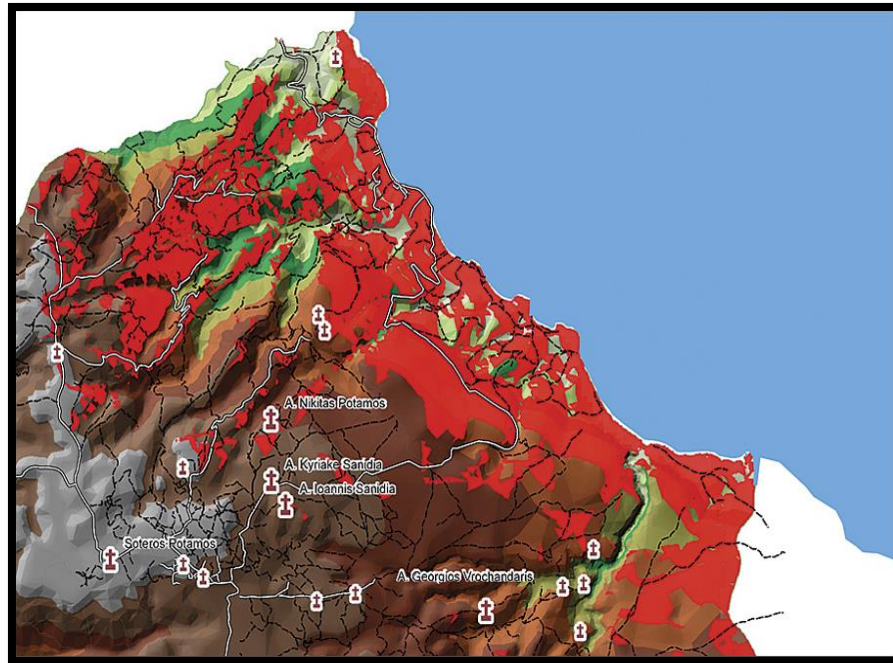
**Figure-4:** The church of Ayios Ioannes at Sanidia<sup>151</sup>

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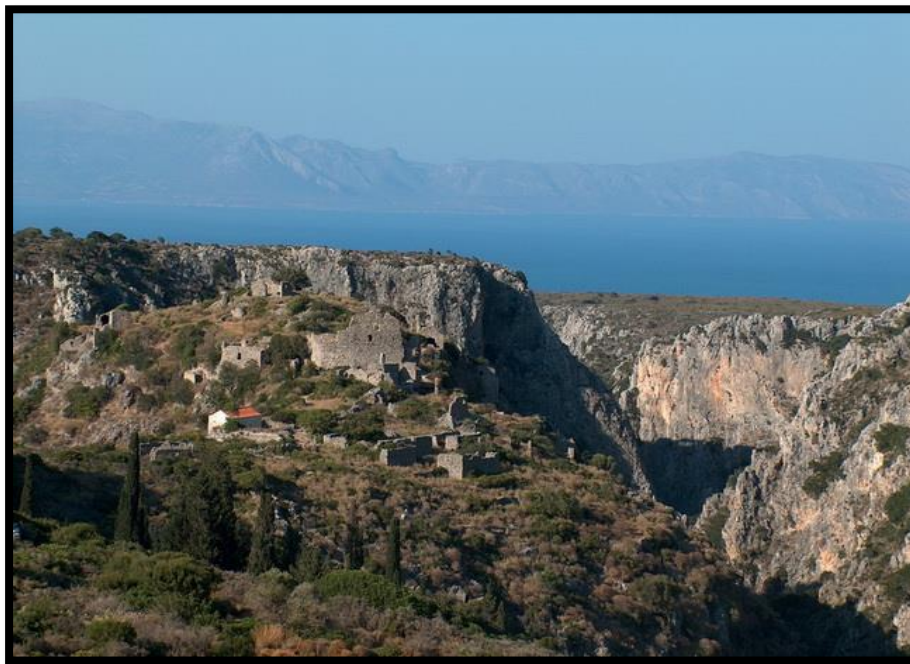
<sup>150</sup> Photograph by Timothy E. Gregory

<sup>151</sup> Photograph by Timothy E. Gregory





**Figure-5:** Map created using GIS by Richard MacNeil, a member of APKAS, depicting the visibility of churches on northern Kythera as seen from the sea.<sup>152</sup>

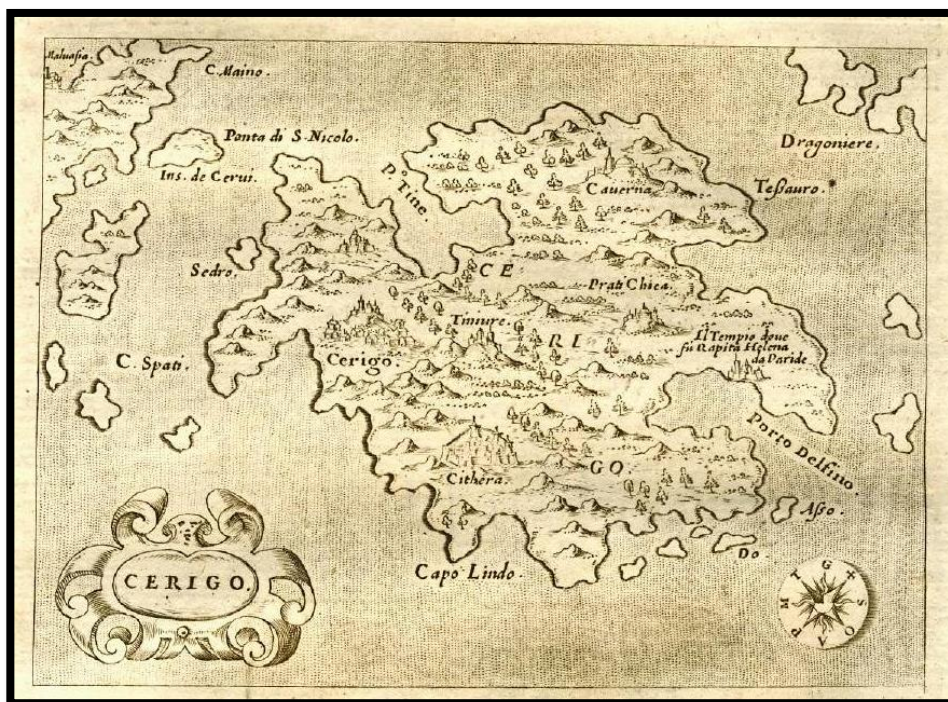


**Figure-6:** Aerial view of Paliochora and its placement within the gorge of “Kake Langada”<sup>153</sup>

<sup>152</sup> MacNeil. *The Greek Island of Kythera Jumps to the Forefront of Historical Research*.

<sup>153</sup> Photograph taken from APKAS website





**Figure-7:** Venetian Map of Cerigo (Kythera)<sup>154</sup>



**Figure-8:** View from Ayios Prokopios at Platia Ammos<sup>155</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Siriol Davies and Jack Davis. *Between Venice and Istanbul: Colonial Landscapes in Early Modern Greece*.

<sup>155</sup> Personal photograph



**Figure-9:** Osios Theodoros (left) and St. Rocco (right) holding the castle at Chora<sup>156</sup>



**Figure-10:** The Panayia Myrtidiotissa<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Image taken from <http://kithiraikanea.blogspot.com>

<sup>157</sup> Image taken from <http://kithiraikanea.blogspot.com>

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